

**Testimony to the Environment Committee for January 31, 2011 Public Hearing
Submitted by Anne Farnum**

I am writing today express my strong support for S.B. 831 before the Environment Committee restoring liability protection to municipalities. Municipalities and municipal entities like the MDC must have total immunity from liability lawsuits filed by citizens using MDC property for recreational, or any other, purpose.

I have lived in this area for most of my 61 years, and have used MDC reservoir property and woodland trails year round over that span of years. It has been a place that I treasured. Access to these areas greatly contributed to my quality of life at all stages: as a young child in a young family, as a teenager, as an adult, and now as an elder. The reservoir was, and is, a place where friends can go to meet for a beautiful, peaceful walk and great conversation. It's a place where we can commune with nature; ponder life's questions deeply, and make important choices and decisions; where we can regenerate and renew ourselves - releasing the heavy stresses of everyday life.

This beautiful area has always been openly available to everyone for free. Myself, and the family and friends that I've shared experiences on MDC property with, always understood clearly that we were responsible for our own actions; and that we used this precious resource at our own risk. It is a shame, and a sign of weakening of our character as a community, that some people no longer feel they should take responsibility for their own actions, even when that attitude means that they rob the greater community of a crucial asset. It was a grave mistake for the court to award damages to an irresponsible biker. It is untenable for the MDC to be exposed to liability from anyone who is reckless, or even just unlucky; and who then refuses to be responsible for their own actions. Without legislation to provide total immunity from lawsuits, I believe the MDC will have no choice but to close off citizen access to their properties.

And that would be a great loss to residents of all the surrounding towns. Hundreds of thousands of citizens each year used MDC property to commune with nature, and for active recreation. These properties are an irreplaceable jewel and a tremendous asset to all these people. Given our high stress, fast paced lives, they are also an essential asset. Nearby spots where we can meet friends, enjoy nature, regenerate, and gain perspective are rare. The fact that these beautiful areas have been open to all - young and old, all income levels, all races, nationalities and creeds, also makes them a major foundation for peaceful connection among the diverse peoples of our communities. It would be a great tragedy, and a significant diminishment of our quality of life, to lose all the value that these beautiful areas provide. And it would be an additional tragedy to provide further support to the forces of irresponsibility and greed.

Please enact the legislation that restores liability protection to the MDC and all property holders that allow their land to be freely used for the enjoyment of the public. Honestly - I will not vote for any legislator that opposes the protection that the MDC must have to maintain public access to these vital areas.

Thank you,
Anne M. Farnum
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